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ABSTRACT

This paper offers ways of introducing young children to global history and geography at the age of four when they traverse a period of intuitive sensitivity to time and space. Through this instruction they develop lasting interest in history and geography. The curriculum used, "The First Frontier," presents space as world geography and time as the history of its people, in keeping with the child's time-space world view. The curriculum guides children through various time periods and world geographical locations. (Contains 13 references.) (BT)

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GLOBALIZATION OF SOCIAL STUDIES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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GLOBALIZATION OF SOCIAL STUDIES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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Abstract: This paper proposes to offer ways of introducing young children to global history and geography, when at the age of four they travers a period of intuitive sensitivity to time and space. Through this instruction they will develop lasting interest in history and geography.

Introduction: the theory

A previous research study (Barry Davis, 1999) advances the evidence that children by the age of four develop accurate and lasting conceptions of time (past, present, future) and space (near and far away). The methodology used for collecting the data of this study was action research, and three years later a survey questionnaire administered to the same purposefully selected sample of children and parents. The data collected consisted of four anecdotal records and five visual data response sets of maps made by the children with commentaries. These data were analyzed through de-contextualized/re-contextualized analysis, descriptive analysis and interpretation. The data collected by the survey were further analyzed through an evaluative and comparative analysis. The findings supported the thesis statement that children during their fourth year of life construct representations of space and time using "intuitive sensitivity", or intuition. The findings are supportive of the Vygotskyan (Newman, F., & Holzman, L. (1993) and Montessorian views of development, but bring into question the Piagetian (Piaget, 1972) view. If at this moment of intuitive sensitivity to time and space they are able to experience a specially designed global social studies curriculum, the children will develop lasting ideas and interests in history and geography.

This age period can be regarded as a period of sensitivity, a period of readiness (Bruner, 1963) a teachable moment (Montessori, 1980) and also a window of opportunity for it has significant implications for how history and geography can be taught during the first year of a child's school experience.

Introducing the young mind at the age of four to history and geography through a social studies curriculum which is global in its approach and holistic in its design is especially timely given the concern for globalization and internationalization of curriculum at all levels of education.

The curriculum: 'The First Frontier"

When young children find themselves in a period of sensitivity to space and time, a period in which they grasp the duality of the spatial and the temporal, they have access to a holistic perception of reality. This is a crucial moment to start education of the whole, of the interconnectedness of all things. The social studies curriculum introduced in this paper addresses the concepts of time and space while using a specifically appropriate format according to the cognitive abilities of the young child at the age of four. The curriculum which stresses global history and geography has been entitled "The First Frontier".

Research indicates that young children's understanding is comprehensive (Fuller, 1974) with a holistic view of reality. The young mind thinks in extremes, opposites, dualities or dichotomies of thought (Bettleheim, 1966; Egan, 1997; Krupp, 1997). Young children have affective understanding rather than analytical and they grasp reality through the mythical or the imaginary (Bettleheim, 1966;Egan 1997). This profile of children's modes of thinking, and interests which were of death, the origins of life, "the long ago", and the "far away", guided in designing the curriculum, bringing the world and its history to the children's attention in ways they were best able to understand. Places, peoples and events are presented in crisp, vivid, yet simple images. Only the most salient features are offered by consistently isolating the important elements and presenting them with clarity of form and content.

"The First Frontier" presents space as world geography and time as the history of its people, in keeping with the time-space unity of children's world view. The program is global, aesthetically pleasing and impressionistic, stimulating their ability to learn while stretching their horizons of reality. History is told in story form through the use of "once upon a time in a land far away..." but which stresses reality. Stories of the past or the far away are told to children using the structure of fairy tales which present information in forms of dichotomies., where opposites are clearly drawn, and contrasts defined. Since children think in dichotomous ways, history told in this manner can only enhance its power to make meaning. Both the real and the imaginary are offered, always letting the children know what it will be. The story form method of instructing history is coupled with the use of maps, globes, photographs, artifacts, and appropriately designed manipulatives which enable the children to remember the subject matter. A mode of instruction used in various presentations of subject matter is "dual coding" (Clark & Pavio, 1997; Schwarttz,1997) which appears to enhance long-term memory.

Content and form are powerfully crafted so that not only young minds are drawn into the intricate web of people at a certain time, but also the teachers. It is done in the following way. As the program of studies carries the reader toward the Middle Ages, the pages are of purple vellum inscribed in gold gothic lettering with illuminations. Each region and time period of the world is thus treated with content and form intricately combined. The entire textbook is in manuscript form with artistically-based textual design elements. These physical features are intended to both edify and change the mind-set of the teacher and consequently the children to the concept of time in an historical sense.

"The First Frontier" curriculum carries the children through the various time periods and geographical locations of the world. It is written as a recountal, a narrative form through which lesson plans emerge. In its introduction, it is in keeping with the child's patterns of thought and interests which are turned to the heavens; lessons center on the skies. During the first weeks of school the children's attention is brought to the relationship that exists between the sun, the cardinal points and the seasons with the equinoxes and solstices. Once this is understood, the

passage of time in its alternating pattern of day and night is offered. Of course their understanding is geocentric but of no consequence considering the amount of learning that is occurring at such a very young age. The story of the earth is given through pictures of the different time periods. Continents are looked at, beautiful landscapes, deserts, mountains, rivers , animals, groups of people, individual people, ancient cities, architecture, art, literature and music... Always maps and history go hand in hand. History is told in story form, the "once upon a time", to accommodate for their dualistic ways of thinking, and maps are always there to locate anything that is talked about. Many different types of maps, many different globes, in color, sizes, and textures, slides, photographs, glossy "grown-up" books, music, videos, objects representing material culture, visitors from far off places...all are used to bring the children to a certain place, at a certain time. The story moves through time and from continent to continent, all stories are linked either by people or an event, or possibly something else. Once presentations are made all materials used remain in the classroom at work centers, following each other as a time-line. Each continent holds a special celebration. During the Medieval period there is a medieval pageant: a dubbing of knights. Celebrations are points of pause and reflection before resuming our journey.

Conclusion: Global perspectives and systems thinking

Young children are very capable and insightful, and there is now evidence (Barry Davis, 2000) that children at an early age are able to learn substantive geography, history and cognate subjects in their first year of school (Blaut & Stea , 1999; Rutland, 1993)). Education is moving further and deeper into globalization and internationalization of curriculum. This demands an integrated approach to thinking about internationalized education in terms of progression from the first year of school all the way up to graduate studies. " The First Frontier" curriculum would bring a global perspective and understanding into the classroom at the onset of a child's education. It is important to remember that as young children grow to adulthood they will find a world that now embraces systems thinking (Capra,1988, Senge, 1990). Systems thinking looks at the interconnectedness of time and space as well as other spheres of reality. It emphasizes the

importance of knowledge, information, and therefore education. It offers a powerful way to look at the world; a way that can promote responsible behavior (Lewis,1998). This implies a reformulation of instruction and education offering a holistic view of reality.

With this in mind, early exposure to educational programs designed to help young minds embrace the emerging globalized systems view of the world would permit for the development of cognitive maps or mentalities in harmony with the holistic view of reality. Introduction to the disciplines of geography and history at the onset of the period of sensitivity to time and space would allow children from the very young age of four to think geographically and historically. Such a turn of thought would certainly enhance children's ability to sort and classify information, and ultimately to think critically.

To nurture a child's emerging understanding of reality, which is the holistic duality of space and time, through proper instruction moves the child from an egocentric view of the world to a sociocentric view that provides at least some of the thought patterns necessary to overcome or prevent misconceptions about life and the world that often leads to stereotypical attitudes, while at the same time preparing them for a deeper, broader globalized curriculum as they move through their formal education.

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